

Frequently Asked Questions



West Nile Virus

Fight The Bite!

West Nile Virus

Q: How do people get West Nile virus?

A: Mosquitoes become infected with West Nile virus by biting an infected bird. When these mosquitoes then bite a human, the human contracts the virus. West Nile virus is not spread by person-to-person contact and there is no evidence of the virus spreading to people by handling infected live or dead birds.

Q: Who is at the highest risk for West Nile virus?

A: All residents of areas where the virus has been identified are at risk of getting West Nile virus. Persons over 50 years of age and those with compromised immune systems are the highest at risk of developing serious complications.

Q: What are the symptoms of West Nile virus? How many experience these symptoms?

A: Approximately 80% of people infected with the virus experience no symptoms. The remaining 20% of the people who become infected will display symptoms which can include fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach, and back. Symptoms can last from a few days to several weeks. About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness. The severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness, and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks and neurological effects may be permanent. Serious symptoms may lead to long-term illness or death.

Q: What is the death rate for West Nile virus?

A: The percentage of fatal cases of West Nile virus is less than 1%.

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Q: How long does it take to get sick if bitten by an infected mosquito?

A: Since most infected people experience no symptoms, being bitten by an infected mosquito does not necessarily mean you will get sick. When illness does occur, it usually develops between 3 and 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.



Q: How long has West Nile virus been in the United States?

A: United States health officials first detected West Nile virus in the New York area in 1999. Since then, 46 states have reported confirmed cases of West Nile virus.

Q: Is West Nile virus contagious? Can it be passed between humans, or from an animal to a human?

A: West Nile virus is not transmitted from person-to-person. You cannot get West Nile virus from touching or kissing a person who has the disease or from a health care worker who has treated someone with the disease. Scientists also believe that a human cannot become infected with the virus by handling a live or dead animal infected with West Nile.

Q: What is the peak season for West Nile virus?

A: In most areas of the country, the time when West Nile virus is most prevalent is from August to October.

Precautions

Q: What precautions can I take to prevent mosquito bites?

A: When outdoors, especially at dawn and dusk, wear long pants and long-sleeved, light colored shirts. Insect repellent containing DEET effectively repels mosquitoes. If you have questions about repellents ask your physician. You can also prevent mosquito bites by preventing breeding. Mosquitoes breed in standing water sources, such as neglected pools, plant saucers, spare tires, birdbaths, and decorative ponds. Removing these types of standing water sources from your property will stop mosquitoes from breeding, and in turn, prevent them from biting you. If you do have standing water sources on your property, drain them, or stock them with mosquito-eating fish or "mosquito donuts." Mosquito fish are small, guppy-like fish that eat mosquito larvae before they mature into biting adult mosquitoes. Mosquito donuts are small, donut-shaped tablets that contain Bti, a naturally-occurring bacteria that kills mosquito larvae in water.

Q: What should I do if I find a dead bird? How do I report, and which kinds of birds should I report?

A: If you find a dead bird, please report it to the County of San Diego Vector Control Department by calling (858) 694-2888. Dead birds will be collected and tested for West Nile virus. Please report the bird only if it has been dead for less than 24 hours, is not covered by ants, and is intact.

For more info, visit our website at

www.SDFightTheBite.com

or call our toll free info-line at 1-888-551-INFO.

You may also call our office at (858) 694-2888.